Free starter pack | Behavior line

The Function-First Starter Pack

Find out what the behavior is for before you write the plan. Two weeks of data, one decision tree, one hypothesis you can defend.

Escape	Attention	Tangible	Sensory
Get out of it	Get someone	Get something	Feels right

What's inside

✓ **Function decision tree**
Walk your ABC data to escape, attention, tangible, or sensory, with the question that rules each one out.

✓ **ABC data sheets**
A narrative sheet for you and a quick-code sheet a para can fill out accurately without a training.

✓ **Scatterplot and summary**
Find when the behavior happens, tally what follows it, and write a hypothesis statement your team can test.



Function First
Printable PDF and editable version. For special education teachers, case managers, and behavior staff.

Behavior | Free starter pack

Start here: two weeks to a hypothesis

A behavior plan is only as strong as the function behind it. Strategies that fit escape will backfire on attention, and the reverse is just as true. This pack takes you from a clear definition to a testable hypothesis in about two weeks of data.

1. **Define the behavior (day 1).** Write it so two different adults would count the same thing. Use the box below.
2. **Find the pattern (days 1–10).** Fill in the scatterplot every day to see when and where the behavior happens.
3. **Capture the moments (days 3–10).** During the busy times the scatterplot shows, record ABC data. Aim for at least 10 incidents across different days before you draw a conclusion.
4. **Tally and walk the tree (day 10 or later).** Count what followed each incident, then work through the decision tree.
5. **Write and check the hypothesis.** Draft the statement on the last page and test it with your team before you write the plan.

Write a definition two adults would agree on

Behavior name	
What it looks like Actions you can see or hear	
What it does not include Close calls that shouldn't be counted	
When an incident starts and stops So one long episode isn't counted as five	

Quick test: if you can't see it or count it, rewrite it. “Defiant” is a judgment. “Tears or crumples the worksheet within two minutes of getting it” is a behavior.

This pack supports, but doesn't replace, your state and district FBA procedures. If a behavior is dangerous, or the data still points nowhere after two weeks, bring in your BCBA, school psychologist, or behavior specialist.

Scatterplot: when does it happen?

Student _____ **Behavior** _____

Observer _____ **Dates** _____

Key: leave the box blank if the behavior did not happen. **/** = 1 to 2 times. **X** = 3 or more times. Shade the box if the student was absent. Edit the time column to match your bell schedule.

Time	Week 1					Week 2				
Day	**M**	**T**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**M**	**T**	**W**	**Th**	**F**
Date										
8:00										
8:30										
9:00										
9:30										
10:00										
10:30										
11:00										
11:30										
12:00										
12:30										
1:00										
1:30										
2:00										
2:30										

What the pattern shows

Busiest times	
Quietest times	
What's happening at the busy times Activity, setting, adults, peers	

ABC data: narrative

Student _____ **Behavior** _____

Write what you saw and heard, not what you think it meant. “Threw pencil and said ‘I’m not doing this’” is data. “Got frustrated” is a guess. Record the antecedent and consequence even when they seem small.

Date and time	Activity and setting	Antecedent: what happened right before?	Behavior: what did it look like?	Consequence: what happened right after?	Initials

ABC data: quick-code sheet

Student _____ **Behavior** _____

Built for paras and busy classrooms. For each incident, write the codes for what happened right before and right after. Use more than one code if needed.

Before (antecedent)		After (consequence)	
A1	Task or direction given	**C1**	Task removed, delayed, or made easier
A2	Transition or change in routine	**C2**	Sent out, given a break, or left the area
A3	Told “no,” “wait,” or “not now”	**C3**	Reprimand, redirection, or adult talked with student
A4	Preferred item or activity ended or taken away	**C4**	Peers reacted (laughed, argued, watched)
A5	Adult attention turned elsewhere	**C5**	Given an item or activity, or got it back
A6	Peer interaction or conflict	**C6**	Comforted, or an adult stayed with the student
A7	Unstructured time or alone	**C7**	Nothing changed; task and setting stayed the same
A8	Other (write it in)	**C8**	Other (write it in)

Date	Time	Activity	Before code	Behavior: what it looked like	After code	Initials

Tally what follows the behavior

Function is about what the behavior gets the student, so start with consequences. Go through your ABC data and count each incident under the matching row. If an incident has two codes, count both.

Likely function	Consequence codes	Number of incidents	Percent of incidents
Escape	C1, C2		
Attention	C3, C4, C6		
Tangible	C5		
Possibly sensory	C7		
Total incidents			100%

Note on C2: a student sent to the hallway alone is escaping. A student walked to the office by an adult may also be getting attention. Write down who went with them.

Now check the antecedents

The antecedent should agree with the consequence. If most incidents follow a demand and end with the task going away, escape is a strong lead. If they disagree, collect more data in the busiest setting.

If this function leads	Expect these antecedents	How many incidents had one?
Escape	A1, A2	
Attention	A5, A6	
Tangible	A3, A4	
Possibly sensory	A7, or no clear pattern	

My leading function	

The function decision tree

Start with your tally. Work down the questions in order. Stop at the first “yes” that survives its rule-out question. If the rule-out answer is also yes, keep going down the tree.

Question 1
Is the behavior most often followed by the task, setting, or person going away (C1, C2), and does it usually start after a demand or transition (A1, A2)?

Yes: Escape is likely.
Rule it out: Does it still happen when nothing is being asked and the student is doing something they like? If yes, escape probably isn't the whole story.

No ↓

Question 2
Is it most often followed by an adult or peer responding (C3, C4, C6), and does it usually start when attention has gone elsewhere (A5, A6)?

Yes: Attention is likely.
Rule it out: Does it happen even when the student already has an adult's or peer's full attention? If yes, keep going.

No ↓

Question 3
Is it most often followed by getting an item or activity (C5), and does it usually start after “no,” “wait,” or something ending (A3, A4)?

Yes: Tangible is likely.
Rule it out: Does it happen when the student already has the item and nobody is trying to take it? If yes, keep going.

No ↓

Question 4
Does it keep happening when nothing changes afterward (C7), across settings and people, including when the student is alone?

Yes: Sensory is likely.
Rule it out: Does it mostly stop when the student is alone or nobody responds? If yes, it's probably social. Go back to question 1 with more data.

No ↓

Two functions tie, or none fit? That's useful information, not a failure. A behavior can serve more than one function, and the same behavior can serve different functions in different settings. Collect 5 to 10 more ABC incidents in the setting where it happens most, or ask your BCBA or school psychologist whether a functional analysis is needed.

Write the hypothesis, then plan from it

A good hypothesis names the trigger, the behavior, and what the behavior gets or avoids. It should be specific enough that your team could prove it wrong.

When _____ (antecedent),
the student _____ (behavior)
in order to ☐ get ☐ get away from _____ (function).
This is more likely when _____ (setting event).

Example: When given a written task longer than one page, the student tears the paper and walks to the door, in order to get away from the task. This is more likely on mornings after a hard bus ride.

Setting events to rule in or out

☐ Tired or poor sleep
☐ Hungry
☐ Illness or pain
☐ Medication change
☐ Conflict before school
☐ Substitute or schedule change
☐ Other: _____

What the function tells you to do next

Function	Teach instead	Change what comes before	Change what comes after
Escape	Asking for a break or for help	Chunk tasks, offer choices, adjust difficulty, pre-teach	Don't let the behavior remove the task; honor appropriate break requests
Attention	Appropriate ways to get attention, like a hand signal or check-in card	Scheduled attention, proximity, a classroom job	Keep responses to the behavior brief; give warm attention for the replacement
Tangible	Requesting and waiting	Visual timers, warnings before transitions, first-then	Access comes through the request, not the behavior
Sensory	An alternative that gives similar input	Planned sensory breaks with OT input, an enriched environment	Redirect to the matched alternative

Ready to write the plan? The full Function First kit includes worked plans for all four functions with the reasoning in the margin, a replacement behavior bank, progress monitoring tools, and a one-page summary for gen-ed teachers. Get it at functionfrst.com.

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